SOUTHERN GOTHIC NOVEL: The Aberdeen Incident

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[LIGHTS up, ACTOR enters with book "The Reigns of Aberdeen." ACTOR takes a moment as if the entire thing is going to be read aloud from the book…presents the book to the audience.]

NARRATOR

"The Reigns of Aberdeen", a novel in the Southern gothic tradition.

(opens book, turns page, clears throat and begins to recite)

Chapter One, "Viola's Orchestration."

(turns page)

Viola Haygood stood shadowed behind the pillars of the Charles B. Evans Memorial Library…

[ACTOR looks around, decides reading it isn't enough, dispenses of the book. ACTOR then uses hands, voice, etc., to become each character, each sound, each image throughout the play. ACTOR's energy changes as soon as he/she begins "working without the net." ACTOR is now completely animated with narration.]

Viola stood shadowed behind the pillars of the Charles B. Evans Memorial Library, as she did every night for the past three weeks. The town square's clock would soon strike 11:00 p.m. Bong! Bong! Bong! She waited.

(becomes the bonging clock, and continues to move head as if it were a bell until "footsteps")

Each night it happened: The clock would chime. Bong! Then?

VIOLA

Footsteps.

NARRATOR

She peered around the white, marble columns to see his silhouette – his dark hair reflecting a shadow on the Aberdeen Baptist Church steeple in the moonlight.

[During "Aberdeen Baptist Church," it is suggested that ACTOR becomes church's preacher when speaking the name. This type of thing is encouraged throughout the performance.]

VIOLA

Who is he? Who is this man who works so late?…Who stops off for a cool one every Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday night at Big Otis's Saloon?

NARRATOR

Viola struggled with the visions she had conjured.

VIOLA

He looks serious and handsome…

NARRATOR

She thought.

VIOLA

…but unassuming. Safely dangerous, yet spontaneous in a quiet, lonely way. He must be shy. He must be everything that any girl would ever want!! Ungh!

You're 23 years old, Viola Haygood, for Pete's sake, take a risk!

NARRATOR

She said aloud, but to no one, as she darted down the stairs to the front door of Big Otis's saloon. In safe distance, Viola's footsteps followed his.

She reached for the door

VIOLA

…the door he touched just moments ago…

NARRATOR

…but it snapped back and hit her shoulder.

Thrown to the sidewalk ((courtesy of the now-airborne drunk)), she yelled out a noise that reflected her pain.

VIOLA

Shi-ut!

NARRATOR

A silhouette appeared in the now open saloon door.

She knew the shape of this body, the hair blowing from smoky air billowing out of the bar. But his steel-gray eyes were all…brand…new to her.

VIOLA

It's you!

(instantly regretful)

I can't believe I said that. I mean, it was you in that doorway a moment ago?

MARK JULIUS

Not exactly. It was him.

NARRATOR

He pointed to another man laying close on the sidewalk.

MARK JULIUS

He needed flying lessons. He was giving Big Otis trash. Causing trouble.

VIOLA

And you…, you threw out the trash?

NARRATOR

According to town gossip, Big Otis grew up on the coast of Southern Mississippi, working the docks to feed four brothers.

MARK JULIUS

Big Otis doesn't deserve that. She's a lady.

BIG OTIS

Why thank you.

(seeing drunken person on sidewalk)

You get the hell out and stay out…

(sees VIOLA)

Not you, honey… You all right out here?

NARRATOR

Viola nodded.

BIG OTIS

Well, I'm big and I'm black, but I don't bite. C'mon in and set yourself down over t' here. I'll gitcha somethin' take the pain right out that joint.

NARRATOR

Viola felt something on her scraped elbow. No longer pain, but a warm cloth, a touch—a sensation unlike anything ever experienced before.

MARK JULIUS

Hope that helps. This handkerchief's all I got. Hold tight.

NARRATOR

He pressed her hand over the cloth. Viola felt the chair shaking.

BIG OTIS

Here's you somethin' fo' the pain.

(arms out, pantomimes holding liquor and glass)

NARRATOR

Viola snatched the scotch bottle with one hand, then threw the shot into her mouth with the other.

BIG OTIS

Woe! I guess you all right, then. Sometimes people thinks they jus' do anythang, say anythang, act a fool comin' into my place. But my family 'round here, they make sure I's treated with respect.

VIOLA

Uh-huh.

NARRATOR

But Viola wasn't listening. The handkerchief surmounted her pain.

VIOLA

(pressing handkerchief to elbow)

It smells like him.

(turns to look for him)

Thank yo -…Where is he?…So shy! Is he thinking about me? Am I going too fast?

(starts to fall asleep)

NARRATOR

Big Otis continued weaving homespun stories as the whiskey weighed heavy in Viola's eyes.

[SOUND and/or LIGHTS: signifying time passage.]

She dreamed of rain, of Big Otis, and of course…him.

(NARRATOR begins to morph to VIOLA)

But it wasn't him anymore. It was—

BIG OTIS

Hey! I charges extra for room and board. You gonna sleep here all night?

VIOLA

(waking suddenly)

Oh! Oh, no. I didn't want you to touch me like…I didn't, I swear .

BIG OTIS

Honey, I know you still dreamin' if you thinkin' I'm the boogieman. Too much hooch, you get some bad nights, little girl.

VIOLA

What happened? What time is it?

BIG OTIS

Time for me to close up this place and get my black ass in bed, but I still gots me one customer don't seem to wanna leave. You been asleep nearly three hours.

VIOLA

(looking around)

Where is he? That man. Did he see me here…sleepin'?

BIG OTIS

You mean, droolin'. No, I said you was the las' one left. But you go 'head on and see for yo'self.

NARRATOR

Big Otis reached under the cash register for her keys and the lock box, while Viola stared out the open bar door and onto the dry streets.

VIOLA

When did it stop rainin'?

(at front door of saloon looking out)

BIG OTIS

(crouching down and looking for something)

Girl, it ain't rained for over a month, and then we didn't get but a drop. I think you been asleep 'bout as long as it takes to lose yo' mind.

(walking around VIOLA)

C'mon honey, you needs to get home. I'll walk you part way.

NARRATOR

Viola felt dizzy, drugged almost. Everything seemed in a haze.

Big Otis sang as they walked past the saloon's next-door neighbor, Mrs. Wong's, Aberdeen's only Chinese restaurant. A dim light shone from the kitchen through the dining room and onto the crouching Foo Dogs perched in the entrance way.

BIG OTIS

Girl gets herself messed up walking this late at night by herself 'less she gots protection. Some man'll take himself out on you.

VIOLA

Maybe where you come from, but Big Otis, this is Aberdeen, Mississippi!

BIG OTIS

Wake up and smell the coffee, child, it's burnin'. You thank when a man want it, he start worryin' about what town he in? Don't matter if'n it Aberdeen, Biloxi, Mobile, Nacogdoches, or Appaloosas County—they want it, they see you by yo'self, they gon' take it.

VIOLA

(pointing)

Big Otis? What's that lump…under your shawl?

BIG OTIS

Grandma always tol' me, if I's gonna make it to 30, I best walk quick and carry me a big piece. This here's my peace.

(makes peace sign and pats her waist)

VIOLA

(screaming)

You have a gun?!?

BIG OTIS

Well, I guess now you done tol' the whole Confedera Klux Klan, I ain't gonna have to worry 'bout ever usin' it.

VIOLA

(whispering)

But why do you carry a gun?

BIG OTIS

Is you deaf or is you jus' stupid?

VIOLA

I hear just fine, thank you.

BIG OTIS

Uh-huh…. Here's where we splits up. You take care, honey.

VIOLA

Big Otis, um…who was that man…the one who helped me…you! earlier tonight?

[VIOLA stares as if BIG OTIS were the fairy godmother holding the secret to all wishes. BIG OTIS stares back, eyes light up just a little. She guffaws.]

BIG OTIS

Oh, baby. Don't you worry about him. You just go on your way, get you some rest, go find you a nice white boy from a good family with lots o' money.

(a bit of a warning)

You better off.

VIOLA

But Big Otis. I don't think you understand—

BIG OTIS

I sees jus' fine, thank you. Now you go on home.

NARRATOR

Big Otis turned away, crossed the street and into an open field. The tall grass blew in waves behind her.

VIOLA

Big Otis, I just wanted to ask you who he was.

(no response)

Why won't you tell me?

NARRATOR

Still no reply, Viola began her trek home. Her thoughts flying far, far away… somewhere with him, wherever that somewhere may be.

(SOUND: Angry or distraught cat, immediately followed by Clang…made by ACTOR)

A trash can lid hit the pavement not far from where Viola walked. She neither heard nor saw the canincident criminal scamper before her, casting a dark, feline shadow. Onward Viola walked, stepping through the shadow, still gripping that handkerchief, still listening for…

VIOLA

(she sniffs)

Him.

[NOTE: The end of each chapter should be somewhat obvious to audience. ACTOR should hesitate just a moment before moving seamlessly on to next chapter. This book separates each chapter for ease of reading and rehearsing.]

NARRATOR

Chapter Two, "June Bug."

A hush had settled on the streets of Aberdeen.

Bzzzz. Tink!

A June bug landed on the metal steps of the City's water tower, scratching its legs. Catching itself on a patch of rust, it began to crawl upward.

Popping sounds of rubber tires on gravel filled the air as the Deputy Sheriff's patrol car rolled from the City Hall parking lot. Turning toward East Aberdeen on Highway 45, the engine shifted and kicked into high gear. A small, short screech - and the car sped onward through the flashing, yellow traffic lights.

The June bug scrambled from one rusty patch to the next higher rusty patch. It took flight, heading first away from the banister, then back to it, landing a little higher each time until the rooftops below looked the size of baseball cards.

Another set of headlights flickered off the chain-link fence and onto the tower's legs and belly. The passing 18-wheeler caused lights to swim across blue-green metal: a mirage of waves shimmering across the belly of the tank.

Bzzzzz. Tink! The bug was blown onto the tower's underside by a sudden gust of wind. It caught itself on one of the lug bolts protruding from the tank's center.

The truck headed on toward Tupelo. Red lights faded from the painting of the angry bulldog mascot inscribed on the water tank's east side, obscuring in darkness the 25 feet-tall lettering: "Aberdeen, home of the…."

The wind picked up. The bug, in a sudden burst of strength, leapt into the air, buzzing and flapping along the underbelly of the tower. Then, clinging for dear life on the lower ridge of the tank, it began to crawl tenuously up the "d" in "Aberdeen." Southern wind continued to blow, but the June bug was not lost. It clung to pieces of peeling, red paint.

Buzzzzzz…tink! Now, on the upper ridge of the tower, it crawled over the curve to the top—to safety, ending its grapple with gravity.

A flash in the distance lit the sky. Several seconds of silence followed. Then a rumble…another false promise of rain.

The bug leaned into the wind, rocking to and fro as it crawled toward its peak. Dust joined the wind, striking fiercely against the metal.

The sign above the Chinese restaurant began to creak as it rocked back and forth on rusted screw hooks. [The sound pierced the wind.] The oval "Dr. Pepper" advertisement slammed into the awning.

The light in the back of the restaurant went out.

(looking toward restaurant, concerned)

A door shut in the back alley just off main street. Car doors opening, then closing, seconds apart. The engine cranked, the car sped away, again casting red shadows on Aberdeen's tallest structure.

(leaning)

The insect brushed the side of the bolts that held the gold ball to the very peak of the tower. It reached up to grab the centerpiece.

(reaching)

CHH! Wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh…!

A piece of flying debris hit the ball sending the nocturnal beetle spinning wild into the air. Bzzzzzzzzzzzz….

Ccchh! Our hero crashed into the grass, still buzzing. The wind began to die down.

Brrrrrrzrzzrzzrzzr! Tink!

The June bug headed up the rusty steps and began its trek anew. Upward. Always, upward.

NARRATOR

Chapter Three, "Home."

As the sun broke through her curtains, Viola's eyes slowly opened to the morning. There was a smell of bacon and the sound of crackling grease in the air.

Viola turned toward the windowsill where a June bug lay lifeless. Attracted in by the lamp, then wanting back out to a moonlight beyond the screen.

She reached under the blanket, searching for her memento, the one that smelled of him. It had fallen from her elbow.

VIOLA

Gone!

NARRATOR

Viola swung open her bedroom door, slamming the wall so hard her mother's knick-knacks rocked back and forth in their case. She circled the kitchen then flew out the door, into the yard, screaming:

VIOLA

MO-THER!

DONNA

(opening screen door)

I am right here, Viola. What has gotten into you? Get in this house and leave the neighbors some peace!

VIOLA

Where is it!?

DONNA

Where's what, honey? What are you talkin' about?

VIOLA

The handkerchief! My handkerchief. Where is it? It was on my arm when I went to sleep.

DONNA

Get a hold of yourself, Viola. It was disgusting and all full of blood so I 'bout threw it away.

VIOLA

Aaaaaaaaaaaaahhh! How could you do that? It was mine!

DONNA

Let go of me, Viola. I didn't throw it away, I washed it. It's in there right now with Jimmy's overalls. You can hear that dryer just a banging away from out here, can't you?

NARRATOR

The screen door slammed opened. Viola poured herself back into the yard.

VIOLA

(muffled)

It doesn't smell like him anymore.

DONNA

What are you saying?

VIOLA

It doesn't smell like him anymore. Smells like…, like Jimmy's overalls! Oh, Mama, what have you done?!

DONNA

I don't know. What did I do?

VIOLA

You killed it. It doesn't smell like him!

DONNA

Killed what?

(studies VIOLA's face, it dawns on her)

Is it because we live in a mobile home? Is that why you wanna be trash? I told you a thousand times if you let a man have it he's gonna keep on takin' it till he gets you pregnant. Then he'll just skip the hell out of town 'cause you's damaged goods.

Please do not tell me I have to deal with the consequences. The next 20 years are mine.

NARRATOR

(squatting into an unladylike position by the end of this:)

Her mother stomped back into the house. Viola ignored her mother's slamming of dishes; she brought the stained handkerchief once more to her nose, checking for traces.

(now sniffing as VIOLA)

CARLOS VAZQUEZ

(someone driving by and yelling)

Hey Viola! Lookin' good, baby.

VIOLA

Hey Carlos!

(notices she was "exposed," corrects it, and starts to sniff hanky, then notices)

'MJ.' What is this? His family crest?

DONNA

Viola, get in here and eat your breakfast!

NARRATOR

Viola slunk inside and began reluctantly picking through her bacon.

DONNA

If Jimmy Townsend comes sniffin' by here again today, you tell him the wash isn't done because he still owes me detergent. And remind him I haven't been his babysitter for more than fifteen years. And while you're at it, why don't you see if he'll marry you?

VIOLA

Mother!!

DONNA

Just seein' if you were gonna play in the real world today.

VIOLA

Honestly, mother. I'd rather throw myself off that old rusty water tower and have my picture took afterward than marry Jimmy Townsend.

DONNA

Be a lot less painful in the long run.

(exiting to her room)

NARRATOR

The bedroom door closed behind her.

Still picking at food, Viola didn't hear her visitor.

JIMMY

Hey.

VIOLA

Oh, hey, Jimmy. How are you?

JIMMY

Fine, Vi. Is your Momma home?

VIOLA

She told me to tell you, uh…Mama! What'd you want me to tell Jimmy?

DONNA

Tell him I left already.

VIOLA

She told me to tell you she ain't here…and I'm not pregnant. And keep your hands off my bacon.

NARRATOR

The bedroom door opened revealing her mother to be a changed woman. No longer wearing a teal nightgown and yellow-laced shower cap bearing the fumes of bacon grease, but wearing a sophisticated business suit elegant enough to sway any opponent.

VIOLA

Momma, these biscuits are raw.

DONNA

Jimmy! Why don't you find some place where you can buy your own cup of coffee?

JIMMY

Just had to get a good look at you before you go off to jail with your friend, Big Otis. She's bad company, Donna.

DONNA

Jimmy, I know this is askin' a lot, but please don't be an idiot. She's not the one doin' it.

JIMMY

Really? Three girls missin' from this town alone. Every one of 'em last seen at her saloon. Is that why you got your criminal justice certificate, so you can hang out with criminals?

NARRATOR

Donna ignored Jimmy's ramblings. She got her keys from the kitchen drawer, some change from a bowl on the counter, then grabbed her small leather briefcase. Jimmy held the door open for her.

JIMMY

You need a ride, Donna? Donna?

(almost begging)

C'mon Donna.

DONNA

Jimmy, walking is the best thing for me right now. Viola, I'll see you at lunch.

JIMMY

Let me take you!

DONNA

I can't afford for you to escort me. I am required to be there by law, Jimmy… L A W. Something I am not sure you understand but I am quite certain you do not respect.

JIMMY

It's just a ride.

DONNA

I am to look respectful today, Jimmy, and showing up with you will not accomplish that. Now go steal some more bacon from my daughter. Think you can handle that?

JIMMY

I didn't steal—

DONNA

Jimmy, there's bacon bits on your chin. Bye-bye.

VIOLA

Jimmy…close the door. You're letting flies in the house.

NARRATOR

Jimmy wandered back in and parked himself in the recliner facing the 27" RCA color television set he'd won at the Blue Bluff River Festival Fall Carnival Chili Cook-Off. He'd given it to Donna and Viola as a Christmas gift, but was known to indulge in its convenience, finely tuned picture, and more comfortable surroundings than his own. Pausing briefly on a black and white movie, he mumbled.

JIMMY

I coulda been John Fuckin' Wayne.

VIOLA

Could you choose a channel and stick with it?!?

JIMMY

I'll do what I damned well please, Little Missy, just like you do! So busy chasing after everything in this town with three knees: a left knee, a right knee, and a weenie. What's his name today? Or don't you know yet?

VIOLA

Shut up, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Shut up, Jimmy.

(laughing)

Don't even know his name, do you? Damn girl, if I had a nickel for every time you fell in love, I'd own Monroe county. Well, did he nail ya? Or didn't he?

VIOLA

He's not like that! I'm taking a shower. I have better things to do today than talk with fools who wanna damn me.

NARRATOR

Viola marched down the hall, taking a sharp left into the bathroom, slamming the door.

JIMMY

(mumbling)

Well, you damn me all the fuckin' time…

NARRATOR

Curiosity pulled Jimmy from his movies and morning talk shows. He crept down the hallway, stopping at the bathroom door. He touched the knob and let the door swing open, just enough to peak inside. The shower stopped. Jimmy made haste for Donna's bedroom and pushed the door closed behind him.

Viola studied herself in the mirror for a long time [and then scrambled through the vanity drawers].

VIOLA

I will not be ignored. I will be noticed!

NARRATOR

She knew one thing: she would return this handkerchief…but more importantly, thank the mystery-man properly.

VIOLA

(she stops, hearing something…)

Jimmy, stay out of that refrigerator. And turn the TV down, please.

NARRATOR

When Viola's footsteps faded behind the bedroom door Jimmy made his escape down the hall. But something in the bathroom caught him.

JIMMY

Well, lookie what we got here? A gentleman's hankychif? All bloodied up and… humph. 'MJ.' Gentle man, my ass. Well, well, well, well, well, well, well! Miss Viola, what in Hell's goin' on round here?

(he exits)

NARRATOR

Viola…dressed and refreshed, rushed into the bathroom to retrieve her treasure.

(she looks around; the truth dawns on her—her face becomes a mask of horror)

VIOLA

Jimmy! Jimmy, give it back!

NARRATOR

She charged through the living room - the television still on. She flung herself into the yard.

VIOLA

Jimmy! No. You bastard, bring it back. BRING IT BACK. Jimmy!

(regaining and then vowing)

In the name of Jesus the Baptist and his daughter Mary, I unleash the Gates of Hell on you till you give me back the one true proof of my love.

(turns to notice she's being watched, then notices that her robe or blouse is open)

Go back in your trailer, Mrs. Phelps. This doesn't concern you.

NARRATOR

Chapter Four, "Bein' Have."

(pronounced "Hāve")

From it's early days as a port on the Tombigbee River, Aberdeen, Mississippi has chosen to show its wealth through architecture. Built in 1850 and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978, The Monroe County Courthouse adorns the edge of town with its Greek revival. More of the town's history was being shaped at this moment in the Chambers of Judge Robert Percy, where another civil war was raging. Acting District Attorney Pete Egley wanted Big Otis put under investigation for the recent disappearances. He was banking on suspicion, innuendo and the inexperience of his opponent in the matter.

PETE EGLEY

Donna…Mizz Hazzler,…uh, is that what you like to be called now that you have a part-time job with the Mississippi State Bureau of Investigation?

DONNA

I'd prefer you didn't call me anything at all but Assistant Deputy or Miss Hazzler will suffice. You just go ahead, Little Pete, I think I can keep up.

JUDGE PERCY

Donna, please. I know we're just talkin' about looking into an indictment but behave.

DONNA

I'm sorry, Bobb—Your Honor.

(to PETE)

Let's not blame this on the only black woman you know, Mr. Egley

PETE EGLEY

Mz. Hazzler, I would suggest that your relationship with Big Otis, the defendant, trumps the race card. Now I congratulate you on your new career and all, but her next victim might hit a little closer to home. Or is that part of the plan?

JUDGE PERCY

Would you like me to keep a tab on contempt, Mr. Egley, or just pay as you go?

(fanning himself)

Hooo! We need to take a break. I'm sweatin' like a whore in line on judgment day. I'm sorry, Donna. We're gonna have to come back after lunch and finish this.

NARRATOR

Exiting chambers, Donna saw a dark-haired man with steel-gray eyes standing alone across the hall, concerned – her new boss was watching her and didn't want to be noticed back. A reporter followed Donna from the courthouse onto Commerce Street.

REPORTER

Excuse me…excuse me, Miss Hazzler, I'm Jeffrey Stone from the Jackson Gazette. If you could just tell me what you know about the missing girls? Perhaps you know them through your friend, Big Otis Cole, the bar-owner…the bla…African-Amer…

BIG OTIS

Oooooo! You mean the bitch that's gonna kick yo' ass?

REPORTER

Well look what we have here: an assistant with the MSBI and the Woman Most Likely Involved.

BIG OTIS

Shut yo' mouth and leave Mz. Donna alone. Go on. Git!

NARRATOR

She jolted his buttocks with her foot, lifting him slightly into the air. He hit the ground running.

BIG OTIS

You got some man followin' you, Mz Donna, you oughta holler fo' backup.

DONNA

Thank you, Big Otis, for being such a good friend.

BIG OTIS

I treats people same's they treat me, dat's all. Oh, and ya'll have a nice lunch next do'.

(she winks)

NARRATOR

Big Otis disappeared into her saloon.

VIOLA

Momma, come on. I've got things to do.

DONNA

Viola, please do not sit on Mrs. Wong's Foo Dogs. They're decoration.

NARRATOR

Opening the door, the rush of air conditioning poured out of the restaurant.

MRS. WONG

May hepp yew? May hepp yew? Two smo-keen, non-smokeen?

DONNA

Could we sit over in the corner, Mrs. Wong,…

(two syllables, or at least ALMOST two to say "Wah-oong")

by the dragon?

MRS. WONG

Oooh, yes, yes. You sit by dragon. Nice to sit there. You like soup?

DONNA

Yes, please. Two, Mrs. Wong.

MRS. WONG

One mea-nuh, I get you tea.

NARRATOR

She scurried off into the kitchen.

DONNA

I love this place. Never a soul here.

NARRATOR

The quiet was broken by the cackles of Fran and Waleeta, the local mavens of scandal.

The doors flung open. Donna saw their dark silhouettes against the high noon, summer sun.

Mrs. Wong flew from the kitchen.

MRS. WONG

May hepp you? May hepp you? Two smokeen, non-smokeen? You like sit by dragon, too?

NARRATOR

Fran spoke for both of them.

FRAN

Smoking…so we can talk.

MRS. WONG

You sit where you like. I get you tea.

VIOLA

Momma, I'm hungry.

DONNA

Viola, would you please hush. We're in public. Be-have.

(SOUND kitchen pots crashing/argument going on)

NARRATOR

A crash of pots and pans rang from the kitchen, coupled with Mrs. Wong yelling with someone. Donna could only see the back of his head, covered with a red bandana. An argument ensued and a door shut, then a brief silence before Mrs. Wong charged out again.

MRS. WONG

I so sorry. Yes, we not have anything today but fried rice with chicken. I wish I make you something else, but Mr. Wong…hhhhhe not home right now. I make you fried rice?

DONNA

That'll be fine.

VIOLA

And Momma, I am not pregnant!

FRAN

Pay up, Waleeta!

DONNA

Could you say it a little louder, Viola?

(trying a different approach)

Honey, I know that my little girl is the oldest living virgin in the state of Mississippi. I'm just scared to death - the way you fall in love…so much!

VIOLA

Momma, I do not. This one's different.

DONNA

All right. So, what's his name?

VIOLA

How can you say that to me, Momma? What does his name matter?

(sobbing)

DONNA

You're right, darlin'. Why would you wanna know their name?

VIOLA

Jimmy stole his handkerchief and I want it back.

NARRATOR

The other table's silence fueled the flames of Donna's suspicions. Fran and Waleeta were staring.

Mrs. Wong charged once more from the kitchen carrying two Styrofoam containers.

MRS. WONG

Thank you very much, you have two nice day, okay? It thirteen dollo and fifty-three cent.

VIOLA

We didn't order this to go.

DONNA

We'll take that as a sign.

(paying)

Viola, let's go. Thank you, Mrs. Wong.

(noticing them)

Fran? Waleeta? Ya'll enjoy this lovely afternoon.

NARRATOR

Donna and Viola paused a moment outside Mrs. Wong's, staring out into the street, each with a Foo Dog standing guard behind them. Donna broke the silence.

DONNA

Why can't people behave? They're only blamin' this on Big Otis 'cause she's not from here. Course, it doesn't help the fact that she's African Ameri—

VIOLA

Momma, I got things to do before I go back to work.

NARRATOR

Viola took one of the lunch boxes from her mother and walked down Commerce Street.

Donna turned the other way and took her lunch into Big Otis' Saloon. As the swinging double doors closed behind her, the "o" in Mrs. Wong's neon sign flickered twice then faded from red to black.

NARRATOR

Chapter Five, "Losing."

The 2:30 break was no time to leave a construction site for the day. But termination was Jimmy's familiar…though he never accepted it well.

JIMMY

I hope you all…, eat dye and shit!

(to himself as ACTOR pantomimes getting into car/truck…JIMMY realizes his mis-wording)

Shit.

NARRATOR

Jimmy reached to the passenger's side floorboard to retrieve a beer from the cooler.

(drools, stares at can)

A scream jolted the beer from Jimmy's hand, sending it beneath the pedals. He looked up to see Viola crossing the road. Jimmy tried to brake, but instead, punctured the beer can with his foot.

(SOUND of the can spritzing into JIMMY's face)

Beer in his eyes, he grabbed one side of the steering wheel with both hands and yanked, sending his pickup into a one hundred-eighty degree spin. After a sharp blow to Jimmy's head by the steering wheel, of which, he had not yet let go, his head popped back against the headrest.

JIMMY

Viola!?

NARRATOR

The first still vision for Jimmy was Viola's legs peeking out from between Mrs. Wong's delivery/mini-van and the curb. People began to pour out onto Commerce Street to see what the noise was about. Across the street, Jimmy saw Donna standing on the courthouse steps, gaping at him. Pete ("Little Pete") Egley stood just a few steps above, holding a case in each hand, rolling his eyes.

Jimmy laid rubber, heading to what he hoped would be freedom.

Mrs. Wong appeared from behind the delivery/mini-van.

MRS. WONG

I sorry. I not know I hit her. I not know. I so sorry.

VIOLA

Oh God! My books.

(looking down at herself)

My skirt!! You son of a bitch, Jimmy Townsend. You coulda killed me, you MOTHER….

NARRATOR

Mrs. Wong's wailing was barely heard over Viola's vernaculars.

VIOLA

…FUCKER!

NARRATOR

Mrs. Wong fainted.

VIOLA

And where the hell is Sheriff Billy Pingleton in all this? A third of my piss-squat salary on taxes and I get some fat-ass, high school drop out who became a cop just to avoid speeding tickets. Yeah, that's my luck. That's my hero of the day. I swear, I'm gonna make time next year. I am gonna register to vote.

NARRATOR

She bumped into someone but before she could lift her head to allow the proper angle for a good tongue-lashing.

MARK JULIUS

'Scuse me. It's Viola, isn't it?

VIOLA

(gasps)

NARRATOR

The sound of his voice pierced through her heart and nailed her feet to the brick sidewalk. Though Viola intended her response to be dainty, she was certain it had come from her mouth with the resonance of an elated parakeet.

VIOLA

Ye-ess!

(she squeaks)

MARK JULIUS

My name is Mark. Mark Julius.

Are you all right, Viola?

VIOLA

(sigh)

Yeah.

MARK JULIUS

If you don't mind my being too forward—

VIOLA

Oh no, go ahead. Ask. Don't be shy. You just ask me whatever's on your mind.

MARK JULIUS

Are you sure you should—?

VIOLA

If I blush, you won't think me silly, will you?

MARK JULIUS

I, uh, guess not. I was just saying, maybe you should see a doctor. Even though you may feel fine, you've hit your head—you might be hurt and not know it.

VIOLA

You are so sweet and so considerate to think of me like that, Mark Juuuulius.

NARRATOR

Even better than the hundreds of names she'd first imagined, this was the lashing her tongue truly wanted.

DONNA

Viola, you don't have any business wanderin' the streets. We've gotta get you to a doctor.

VIOLA

(furious)

Mother, I am tryin' to have a private conversation! Mark Julius is a very important person to me and until I have finished hearin' everything he's got to say, I ain't goin' anywhere.

DONNA

Viola, the whole town's out here watchin'. A little dignity?

VIOLA

Mother, you are so crazy sometimes.

NARRATOR

Oblivious to her spectacle, Viola turned to speak with her savior of the shadows once more, but Mark Julius had disappeared into the crowd.

DONNA

(to the crowd)

Why don't ya'll twist your red, rubber necks around and let your feet take you where your nose points.

(to VIOLA)

Come on, Viola. We need to get you over to the paramedics.

VIOLA

His name is Mark, momma. It's Mark.

[VIOLA's eyes are distant. DONNA takes her arm and began to pull her away.]

NARRATOR

Pete Egley, meantime, directed the paramedics through the chain of events.

PETE EGLEY

No, not the Asian woman…this is the girl who was hit – Viola Haygood.

(to MRS. WONG)

However, Mrs. Wong, here's my card. I wish you'd give me a call if you have any medical complications or feel you've been mistreated in any way.

DONNA

Real convenient, Little Pete. You didn't even have to chase this ambulance. Now let me tell the paramedics what happened.

PETE EGLEY

I just told them.

DONNA

Yeah, but your lips were movin', Pete. What are they to believe?

NARRATOR

Chapter Six, "Miss Understanding."

Viola burst into Big Otis' Saloon about the same time as the night before. Pete Egley was sitting at the bar watching Otis work. Another scruffy man, red bandana wrapped around his head in dew-rag fashion, was playing pinball.

MURRAY PRUITT

Tilt?!?! This piece of shit stole my quarters.

NARRATOR

There was a great deal of tension in the air but this, as with most interpersonal relationships, was something Viola missed. She had tension of her own.

VIOLA

Where is he? Where's Mark? I know you know.

BIG OTIS

Girl, calm down. Mistuh Julius ain't been in tonight. So you can quit yo' hidin' at the lib-ary.

PETE EGLEY

Viola Haygood. I can't believe your mother would let you out – or maybe she figured you don't have to worry.

VIOLA

Little Pete, this is important.

(to OTIS)

Where is he!?!

BIG OTIS

I s'ppose that's Ag-…Mistuh Julius' bu'ness, don't you?

(she's pissed)

PETE EGLEY

Now they come to you, Big Otis. Damn. How d'you do it? So she's your next victim?

BIG OTIS

Get the hell outa my bar!

NARRATOR

Her voice made Viola jump. She ran out the door and down the street before she realized that maybe Big Otis wasn't talking to her.

NARRATOR

Chapter Seven, "Gone."

Viola found herself again clinging to a column in front of the Evans Memorial Library awaiting his nightly passage. What Big Otis would not divulge, she would discover on her own.

The clock struck but the footsteps were to be late.

VIOLA

Mark Juuu-lius. Mmmm. Beats the hell out of Haygood. …Viola Julius…Mr. and Mrs. Mark Juuu—

JIMMY

Hey kitty. How you doin' pussy, pussy, pussy, pussy.

NARRATOR

Viola guessed that Jimmy was coming up the right side of the pillar so she bolted around the left. Not exactly being the type to understand architecture, sound patterns, or geometry, she gravely misjudged, running head first into Jimmy's chest.

JIMMY

(takes VIOLA's shoulders in his hands)

Damn girl, I could see your shadow from the street. What the hell you doin' hidin' up here?

VIOLA

Get your hands off of me. Who do you think you are walkin' around after what you did to me?

JIMMY

(whispering)

I didn't do shit. You got scared and fell over.

VIOLA

You almost hit me and then you took off.

JIMMY

When are you gonna figure out you don’t get to pick who you love?

VIOLA

Jimmy, you ain't never made a lick of sense about anything. Let me go.

(stomps her heal onto his boot)

Ow!

JIMMY

Steel toes, darlin'. You missed my foot and you missed my point, Viola. I'm goin' to turn myself in. You understand me?

NARRATOR

Big Otis stood between two pillars, a darkened shadow with a shining metal object in her hand that happened to be pointing at Jimmy's pelvic region.

BIG OTIS

I don' understand a thang you sayin' to dat li'l girl. Why don'ts you splain to me one mo' time – clear it up.

VIOLA

Big Otis, NO!

BIG OTIS

Well make up yo' mind, child. You want me to blow this piece o' trash to hell or you wanna be his puntang?

VIOLA

(confused)

Run, Jimmy. RUN!!

NARRATOR

Jimmy took Viola's direction and bolted South.

BIG OTIS

Girl, what is wrong wichoo?

VIOLA

I don't know.

BIG OTIS

You lookin' like you some 'possum caught in the floodlights.

Come on, baby, you needs somethin' after dis.

NARRATOR

Big Otis took her arm, guiding her to the saloon. A clap of thunder echoed from the east, startling Viola.

BIG OTIS

That sky gettin' thirsty.

VIOLA

Yeah, me too.

NARRATOR

An alley cat watched them cross the street, then ran after them, casing the doorway.

BIG OTIS

Come on in and make yourself homely while I go in back a minute. Watch my drawer!

NARRATOR

Viola reached over the counter preparing a glass of ice water and a double shot of the nearest bottle.

She downed the shot just in time to hear—

VIOLA

Footsteps!

(VIOLA walks to door)

It is about damn time.

NARRATOR

The door swung inward. Viola was yanked outside. Hands were in her face, then darkness.

The cat sat backlit in the window of Mrs. Wong's watching Viola being carried away, her arms dangling in the moonlight. The cat stood stretching – flicking its tail skyward, brushing his side against the glass, then jumped to the sidewalk and ran into the saloon.

NARRATOR

Across town at the Natchez Trace Mobile Home Park, Donna did something she hadn't done in years. She'd bummed a cigarette from Robbiestene, the meter maid, and now she was going to smoke it.

DONNA

Where is it? I deserve it! Aha!…Viola? Viola, darlin'? Where does she get the energy?

(DONNA lights and puffs the cigarette, enjoying it)

NARRATOR

The long-awaited return to tobacco made Donna a little high. Viola for once would have to take care of herself.

DONNA

Dear God, please tell me I taught that girl somethin'.

NARRATOR

Lightening flashed in the distance.

DONNA

(DONNA counts to four, ACTOR makes thunder SOUND)

Four. Four miles away.

(takes a drag)

That's a ways.

NARRATOR

But Viola would not be home tonight. Viola wasn't sure where she was. The bright light on the ceiling and the horrible odor woke her. There was her attacker.

VIOLA

What is goin' on? You're not supposed to—

HER TBD ABDUCTOR

(in a drugged out way…the way VIOLA would hear it)

Shut up!

NARRATOR

A hand reached up with a cloth, placing it over her mouth. She was out.

NARRATOR

Back in Aberdeen, an alley cat was being chased out of Big Otis' saloon as Mark Julius stepped through the swinging double doors.

MARK JULIUS

Whoa!

BIG OTIS

Ahh! Damn. I hate cats. They bad luck. Always lookin' at you like you done somethin' when they the ones doin' somethin' all the time. 'Minds me of my Aunt Tilda. Didn't like her neither. Plain evil.

(genuflects)

May she rest in pieces.

NARRATOR

The customer still at the pinball machine teased Big Otis.

MURRAY

(playing pinball)

That cat sure was watchin' you, Otis.

BIG OTIS

That's Big Otis to you.

MARK JULIUS

(leaning in to whisper at BIG OTIS)

Who's the pinball junkie?

BIG OTIS

He come in coupla hours ago wearin' that tacky red dew-rag on his head. Like he black or somethin' – he just look like an angry, gay poodle. Everything go all right?

MARK JULIUS

Yeah. Everything went just fine.

(pats her on the shoulder)

NARRATOR

Chapter Eight, "Shine Shack."

Jimmy finally tired of running somewhere on Hickory Street where he caught sight of tourists pulling up to the Huckleberry Inn—a quaint and friendly Bed & Breakfast.

JIMMY

(JIMMY is hotwiring the car)

This fightin' Bulldog's goin' home. It's been a bad day.

NARRATOR

Heading up Hickory in his hot-wired escape wheels, Jimmy felt bad for what he'd done.

JIMMY

Oh, well, fuck the tourists. They got insurance.

NARRATOR

An oncoming car flashed it's headlights at him.

JIMMY

Shit. Cop.

CARLOS VAZQUEZ

(yelled from the "oncoming car")

LIGHTS. Stupido Maricones!

JIMMY

FUCK YOU, CARLOS! Lights. Damn.

(JIMMY searches for where to turn on the headlights)

This time I ain't comin' out. They're just gonna look around one day and figure out they ain't no more Jimmy. Up and gone. Wild, that one.

(laughs)

Maybe I'll run into ole' Elvis himselvis.

NARRATOR

The night air felt wet and mossy. He could feel himself getting closer to the river. Illuminated by headlights, tree branches looked like roots growing overhead.

No one knew the Tombigbee River like Jimmy. He could lose his tracks and make good time getting to the old moonshine shack. The Shine Shack was Jimmy's refuge, his family secret…and his heirloom.

The sputtering of the engine brought Jimmy from his thoughts.

JIMMY

No!! I did not just go by the BP and did not get gas. Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!

(pounds his head on the steering wheel or hits head with his hand)

Go, just go. Go, go, go. Go, go, go, go, go.

(exits car, kicking and cussing)

NARRATOR

Brushing through the thicket, climbing fences, fighting a path toward the water…Jimmy dove into the Tombigbee River as if diving for home plate in the last game of his senior year.

Treading south through the water, there, finally, was the tree…the shape of a woman holding her arms out over the river, almost pleading. Behind her, a large mound of cattails. There lay the path to the Shine Shack.

A burning lamp in the window sent a chill through Jimmy.

JIMMY

What the…??

NARRATOR

He crept through the piles of scrap metal and broken glass, knocking over an oil drum. He fell as he climbed the rotting steps but caught himself on one of the old bus seats that lined the porch. A shadowed figure ran past the window.

JIMMY

I don't know who the hell you are but—

(JIMMY kicks down the door)

NARRATOR

And there in the corner, he saw her: asleep, blouse torn.

JIMMY

Viola?

NARRATOR

Everything went black for a moment. Jimmy's head hurt. His face was on the ground….

Contrary to what he had believed, perhaps yesterday would not be the worst day of Jimmy's life.

NARRATOR

Chapter Nine, "Wising Up."

The sun peered through termite-ridden slats, bringing Jimmy a new day. Trash and debris littered the place. Within inches of his fingers he found Corona bottle caps and used lime pieces, fresh.

JIMMY

Jerry's been here…with Murray!

NARRATOR

Murray Pruitt. There were few things Murray Pruitt loved: crystal meth, crystal chandeliers, and Jerry Townsend, Jimmy's brother – and Murray's oft time cellmate. The drug of Jerry came equipped with a companion depressant. Corona with lime and…

JERRY

Ya' only drink eleven. Twelfth one is the Judas beer.

NARRATOR

Jerry had instructed Jimmy of that at the age of fourteen.

Out the back door, Jimmy found what he now expected: eleven empty bottles lined up in a semi-circular pattern with the Judas beer placed as the dot in a sort-of (or "morphed") question mark, now at Jimmy's feet along with bottle opener and remaining piece of lime.

JIMMY

Well. Just call me Judas.

(pantomimes drinking beer, dealing with lime, etc.)

I can't believe he brought that little shit to the shack.

NARRATOR

He stared at the eleven apostolic, martyred bottles.

JIMMY

(throwing his empty, as if bowling)

Strike!

NARRATOR

One of the bottles continued rocking back and forth until it found it's equilibrium.

JIMMY

Shit!

(kicks bottle, watches it fly, then notices something)

Mother F…..

NARRATOR

And there in the distance, Jimmy saw….

NARRATOR

Chapter Ten, "The Bad Guys."

SINGING RADIO VOICE (THE CONNER SISTERS)

Double-U - T - P - O.

SPEAKING RADIO VOICE

The Big 98. 8, 8, 8…

RADIO DISK JOCKEY

Serving up some Texas two-step for breakfast on this fine Mississippi mornin'.

UNNAMED COUNTRY SINGER

"Maybe to-morrow, I'll have you,

But looks like today that just ain't true…"

NARRATOR

The radio blared from the parked vehicle as Murray channel-surfed and Jerry attempted to work on the engine.

MURRAY PRUITT

I hate country music.

(surfs the radio, ACTOR makes static noises.)

I LOVE this song.

[MURRAY begins badly-singing an obnoxious and ubiquitous pop song, like "I Kissed A Girl" or something else horribly inappropriate.]

JERRY

Take that damn bandana off your head, Murray Pruitt, I'm sick of lookin' at it. What did you give her, anyway?

MURRAY PRUITT

Just chloroform…and a coupla 'ludes.

JERRY

Damnit! They don't want 'em drugged!

(checks on VIOLA)

Shoulda wore off by now. Everything's goin' to High Hades in handbasket.

MURRAY PRUITT

Well, what do you want me to do with her while you're fixin' the car?

JERRY

I want you to shut the hell up.

[MURRAY lip-synchs quietly for a moment until he notices JERRY wants him to stop. MURRAY should make a gesture that tells us this, or make some sort of audible sound showing his disappointment.]

NARRATOR

Chapter Eleven, "The Best Laid Plans."

Big Otis—AKA, Agent Odessa Cole—was briefing her newest MSBI recruit, bringing her up-to-date on this, her first case. Now, so very personal. Rookie Undercover Deputy Donna Hazzler wore the weight of her dilemma.

BIG OTIS

I know this is hard, but when you signed up, you knew there was a possibil—

DONNA

I signed up to do somethin' with my life and maybe even change the world—not get my daughter kidnapped. I can't believe you put a microchip in Viola's arm—and right there in the saloon.

BIG OTIS

You wanted her protected. We did what we could. Besides, it fell out.

DONNA

Fell out?

BIG OTIS

Calm down. We used the backup plan. And it's been beeping in one steady place. She's just a few miles away.

DONNA

Do I even want to know what your backup is?

BIG OTIS

You said how bad in love she was with Mr. Julius. I did not believe you, but you were right. She would not let go of his handkerchief and that there—

DONNA

Handkerchief? She doesn't have the handkerchief anymore. Jimmy Townsend stole it.

BIG OTIS

What kind of freak would steal a dirty hankie?

DONNA

It wasn't dirty. I washed it.

BIG OTIS

What the—?

(goes to phone)

…Agent Julius? Mark, baby. You need to come in here. We gots a problem.

NARRATOR

Chapter Twelve, "Now is the Time for All Good Men."

Jimmy walked a few hundred yards from the Shine Shack. There, through the cattails, was his brother Jerry. His hair had grown since he'd last seen him. Murray looked troubled as ever.

They were arguing. Apparently, they'd stolen Mrs. Wong's delivery/mini-van but were now broken down.

JIMMY

(laughing, but keeping it quiet)

Never could teach that dumb-ass how to fix a foreign.

MURRAY PRUITT

Shhhh! D'you hear something?

JERRY

Don't shush me, you shush. (Besides…)

You got no idea. She may be dumb as a post, but she's still a virgin.

MURRAY PRUITT

And how the hell would you know that?

JERRY

(laughing)

'Cause my little brother's been in love with that lame bitch since he was old enough to get a hard on.

MURRAY PRUITT

So that's what this is about? Some revenge crap with your brother? Don't you know you can't be around a dark cloud without gettin' struck by lightnin'.

NARRATOR

Jimmy could take no more.

JIMMY

Three-time losing son of a bitch! Son OF A BI—!!

[JIMMY lunges for them. There is various rolling around and fighting going on during the next portion of dialogue…a three-way physical fight MUST be going on somehow until MRS. WONG's line…without the audience getting lost. Best of luck! It's not easy.]

JERRY

Mother f—

MURRAY PRUITT

Son of a—

JIMMY

You! You're supposed to be my brother. You call this—

JERRY

Jimmy, let go—

MRS. WONG

(SOUND: Gunshot)

Fleeeeeeeze!

NARRATOR

Mrs. Wong stood holding a revolver.

JIMMY

Missus Wong? What the heck are you doing?

MRS. WONG

Little Jimmy Townsend. You try so hard.

(ACTOR pantomimes removing wig, and MUST change voice to be Filipino/Brooklyn)

I am not Mrs. Wong, I'm Susan Santos. Mrs. Wong is not my name.

JIMMY

Mrs. Wong, why ain't you talkin' Chinese no more?

MRS. WONG/SUSAN SANTOS

Boy, you stupider than the blonde girl in the car. I'm not Chinese, I'm Filipino. Stupid cracker, red-neck, you can't even tell the difference.

JIMMY

Mrs. Wong, I didn't take Viola, they did.

MRS. WONG/SUSAN SANTOS

Ha! Barely. They suck.

MURRAY PRUITT

Yes ma'am.

JERRY

Shut the hell up.

MRS. WONG/SUSAN SANTOS

I had to help. Again. The sissy one, he don't do anything. I have to do all the lifting with the clumsy one while he goes back and plays pinball!

JIMMY

You mean, you've been the one…

MRS. WONG/SUSAN SANTOS

NO! Putangina! They've been the one. I just make all the rules. But you know what? I don't care anymore. They're supposed to be in North Carolina by now and they haven't moved one inch. I'm not going down with Tweedledum and Tweedledummer.

(MRS. WONG/SUSAN cocks the gun to shoot JERRY and/or MURRAY)

JIMMY

Give me back Viola.

NARRATOR

Jimmy rushed her, screaming, wrestling to the ground until he had the gun and was pointing it at her.

JIMMY

Now who's the stupid one, huh? Huh? Who's stupid now?

(running, almost, to VIOLA)

NARRATOR

Jimmy turned to look for Viola. She was leaning against the van. Awoken by the shots, she'd seen everything.

JIMMY

Are you all right?

VIOLA

I…I can't believe you just did all this for—

NARRATOR

Cars seemed to appear out of nowhere. Donna and Big Otis arrived first, then squad cars, then Sheriff Pingleton, accompanied by Mark Julius…

VIOLA

HIM!

NARRATOR

Viola ignored the running policemen and the general chaos.

VIOLA

(running to MARK)

Mark, you came to save me. You really came.

DONNA

Viola, sweetheart.

VIOLA

Momma? What are you doing with Mark… Oh God, no. Nooooo.

MARK JULIUS

We work together Miss Haygood .. uhm, Viola.

VIOLA

Oh, so you're still available then?

BIG OTIS

Not hardly. Get your hands off my husband.

VIOLA

You're hus…? You mean, you like…

(she's wrecked)

I never stood a chance.

NARRATOR

But before Viola could fully cope with the loss of her one, true love, there was still the matter at hand.

MARK JULIUS

Jimmy, put the gun down.

JIMMY

This ain't what it looks like.

MARK JULIUS

Hands behind your back.

JIMMY

I told you I didn't do it.

VIOLA

Take your hands off him. He saved my life.

MARK JULIUS

Viola, you've been under great duress. You don't know what you're saying. Step back!

VIOLA

You best check the temperature in hell, Mark Julius, if you think you can break my heart one minute and then start barkin' orders at me the next.

(she swats at them a few times)

I said, leave him alone! I Love Him!

NARRATOR

Viola's was not the only gasp.

JIMMY

What did you say?

VIOLA

No. No, no, no no. I did not say that. I've been hit in the head. I've been drugged. I did not say…I love Jim—oh, God. I can't. Noooooooo.

(she faints)

NARRATOR

Chapter Thirteen, "Loose Ends."

DONNA

Viola? Viola, honey.

NARRATOR

Waking in the Aberdeen/Monroe County Hospital, Viola was hearing voices but having trouble opening her eyes.

VIOLA

Mother?

DONNA

Yes, darlin'. You've been out for a good while.

VIOLA

Again?

NARRATOR

Donna did her best to explain everything. Something about missing girls… found…coming home to Aberdeen after their narrow escape from a white slavery ring. Something about Jimmy crying.

A dark, manly figure was facing out the window, Viola couldn't tell who. Across the bed from her mother stood Big Otis, Mark Julius holding her hand. Viola noticed his wedding ring for the first time.

VIOLA

Big Otis. I'm sorry. I almost stole your husband.

BIG OTIS

Uh-huh.

VIOLA

And momma. I'm sorry for all those things I said about Jimmy. He's not that bad.

DONNA

Well, he's hurtin' pretty bad right now. Maybe you oughta –

VIOLA

Maybe I oughta just admit that I've been in love with that sorry bastard since I was old enough to spit.

DONNA

And why is that such a bad thing?

VIOLA

Mother. He's…he's not fairy tale material.

BIG OTIS

He saved your life, honey.

VIOLA

Yes. Yes, he did. He saved my life. And he's never hurt me…intentionally. And he's sure seen me at my worst and I think he still loves me. I just hope he'll still have me.

NARRATOR

The dark figure at the window replied.

JIMMY

You bet your ass I do.

VIOLA

JIMMY TOWNSEND! YOU WERE LISTENIN' THE WHOLE TIME!

BIG OTIS

And ain't you glad he was.

JIMMY

(kneeling at her side, this is a proposal)

I know I don't have nothing, Vi. But I'll do everything I can to keep you happy.

VIOLA

Viola Townsend…hmm. I might have to hyphenate.

BIG OTIS

Mark, baby. Maybe now's a good time to tell 'em about the reward.

NARRATOR

Donna beamed as she watched them smiling, listening to Mark Julius commend Jimmy for his bravery; Viola for her fortitude.

Outside, a June bug was witnessing the scene from the windowsill. Behind him, brittle magnolia leaves rustled, anxiously awaiting the coming storm. An alley cat ran past the tree and took shelter in the window of Mrs. Wong's, partially blocking the newly placed "For Sale" sign.

The flashing yellow traffic light danced in the wind as the rain finally began, bathing Aberdeen, Mississippi, in rejuvenation.

END OF PLAY